

# United States District Court

for the  
Western District of New York

**United States of America**

v.

Case No. 20-mj-1043

**Courtland Renford**

*Defendant*


## CRIMINAL COMPLAINT

I, the complainant in this case, state that the following is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

On or about May 30, 2020, in the Western District of New York, the defendant, COURTLAND RENFORD, did maliciously damage or destroy, and attempt to damage or destroy, by means of fire, Buffalo City Hall, which is a building used in interstate commerce and in any activity affecting interstate commerce, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 844(i).

This Criminal Complaint is based on these facts:

☒ Continued on the attached sheet.

  
*Complainant's signature*  
GERARD M. O'SULLIVAN  
SPECIAL AGENT  
BUREAU OF ALCOHOL, TOBACCO,  
FIREARMS, AND EXPLOSIVES  
*Printed name and title*

Sworn to telephonically.

Date: June 1, 2020

City and State: Buffalo, New York

  
*Judge's signature*  
HONORABLE JEREMIAH J. MCCARTHY  
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE  
*Printed name and title*

AFFIDAVIT IN SUPPORT OF A CRIMINAL COMPLAINT

STATE OF NEW YORK    )  
COUNTY OF ERIE        )    SS:  
CITY OF BUFFALO        )

GERARD M. O'SULLIVAN, being duly sworn deposes and says:

1.     Your affiant has been employed as a Special Agent of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives ("ATF") for over twenty-eight years. Your affiant has attended the Department of Homeland Security's Criminal Investigator School, and the ATF National Academy. Through these schools, your affiant has received specific instruction of Federal Firearms and Arson laws. During your affiant's tenure with ATF, your affiant has written numerous affidavits in support of criminal complaints involving violations of the federal firearms laws.

2.     This affidavit is written in support of a criminal complaint against **COURTLAND RENFORD**, charging him with a violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 844(i), that is maliciously damaging or destroying, or attempting to damage or destroy, by means of a fire or an explosive, Buffalo City Hall, a building used in or affecting interstate commerce. Your affiant makes this affidavit based not only on upon his own personal knowledge of the facts of this case and his own investigation, but also based upon his conversations with other law enforcement officers involved in the investigation of this

case, concerning their investigation of this case and a review of various documents involved in this investigation and case.

### PROBABLE CAUSE

3. On May 30, 2020, protesters had gathered in Niagara Square, Buffalo, New York. At approximately 11:25 p.m., an individual captured on video was seen walking up the steps of Buffalo City Hall, located at 65 Niagara Square, carrying a green laundry basket that contained a fire. The individual then threw the burning laundry basket into the window of Buffalo City Hall, wherein a fire ensued. Buffalo Police Officers and Fire Department personnel entered City Hall in an effort to extinguish the fire. Fire Department personnel extinguished the fire. According to Fire Department personnel, items inside Buffalo City Hall had been destroyed and/or damaged. The individual who threw the fire into Buffalo City Hall was captured on video and can be described as a light to medium skinned black male, skinny build with brown hair. This individual was captured on video wearing a distinct Chanel face mask. News cameras captured this individual throw his hands up after he had thrown the lighted laundry basket into Buffalo City Hall.

4. Based on this information, law enforcement sent out an alert with the individual's picture. Law enforcement personnel notified Buffalo Police Department personnel that the individual captured on video was **COURTLAND RENFORD** and provided his address in Buffalo, NY. Buffalo Police and Fire Department personnel went to **RENFORD's** address where they met two (2) females. Both females gave consent to search the residence. Inside the residence, Buffalo Police and Fire Department personnel searched


the residence and found **RENFORD** hiding behind clothes on the second floor. **RENFORD** was detained and brought to a Buffalo Police Department police vehicle. Buffalo Fire Department personnel verbally read **RENFORD** his Miranda rights, which he acknowledged and agreed to waive. **RENFORD** admitted to setting Buffalo City Hall on fire. Officers also recovered the same distinctive Chanel face mask worn by **RENFORD** inside the residence.

5. **RENFORD** was transported to the Buffalo Police Department for further questioning. At this point, I conducted a videotaped interview of **RENFORD**. **RENFORD** was advised of his Miranda rights verbally and in writing, which the defendant acknowledged and agreed to waive. **RENFORD** admitted that he was the individual who threw the fire burning inside the laundry basket into Buffalo City Hall. **RENFORD** stated that he watched the fire begin to progress after he threw the burning laundry basket into Buffalo City Hall.

6. Buffalo City Hall, located at 65 Niagara Square, is a building that is used or engages in activity affecting interstate commerce. The building is comprised of various offices designed to support the City of Buffalo. Buffalo City Hall consists of the following types of offices: the Mayor's Office, Common Council, City Clerk, Executive Departments and Agencies, the Comptroller, Public Authorities, and various Boards and Commissions. The City Clerk, for example, processes birth certificates, death certificates, marriage certificates, issues dog license, and records ordinances enacted by the Buffalo Common Council and every local law. As for the Executive Departments, the Assessment and Taxation Department assesses and oversees the taxes coming into the City of Buffalo. The Administration, Finance, Policy & Urban Affairs, performs financial analysis and recommendations for City of Buffalo projects and operations. The Permit and Inspection Services oversees all development and

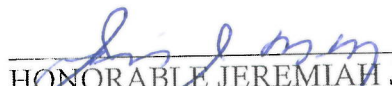
uses of private property in the City of Buffalo. The Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency is an agency dedicated to redevelopment in the City of Buffalo. Also located in Buffalo City Hall is Sue's Deli, a business involved in sale of food and merchandise in New York and elsewhere. These offices and businesses, along with other offices and businesses are involved in interstate commerce or engage in services that affect interstate commerce. See United State v. Dye, 538 Fed. Appx. 654, 660 n.3 (6th Cir. 2013) (discussing fire set to City Hall that held a courtroom is sufficient to establish interstate nexus) and United States v. Saleh, 2020 U.S. App. LEXIS 16111 (2d Cir. 2020) (finding that a deli satisfies interstate commerce element).

7. Based on the forgoing facts, your affiant believes probable cause exists that **COURTLAND RENFORD** violated the offense as laid out in the attached complaint.

  
GERARD M. O'SULLIVAN  
Senior Special Agent  
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms  
and Explosives

Sworn to telephonically

this 1st day of June, 2020.

  
HONORABLE JEREMIAH J. MCCARTHY  
United States Magistrate Judge